

More than 400 climate scientists appeal to the minister

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Impressed by a petition, Valérie Pécresse asks for the organisation of a debate on the accusations of Claude Allègre

The initiative is without precedent: on Tuesday 30 March, more than 400 climate science researchers addressed an appeal to the high authorities of French science to end their silence in the face of what the signatories interpret as repeated infringements of the scientific ethic.

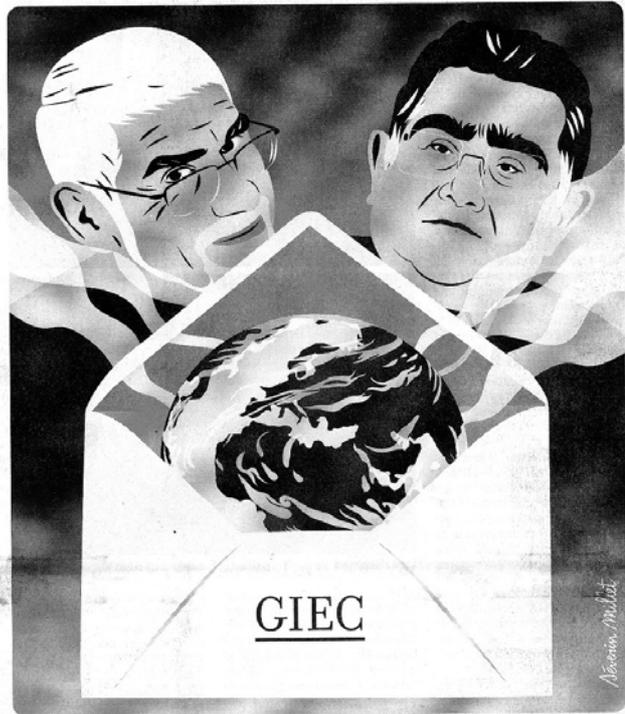
Addressed to Valérie Pécresse, minister of higher education and research, at the presidencies of the CNRS, the Academy of sciences and the principal public research bodies, the letter makes explicit reference to the two most media-covered climate-sceptic personalities in France: the geochemist Claude Allègre and one of his associates, the palaeomagnetist Vincent Courtillot, director of the Institute of Physics of the Globe in Paris; both are members of the Academy of sciences.

The presidency of the CNRS on Wednesday 31 March did not wish to react to this text. For her part, Mme. Pécresse expressed “*her complete confidence in the climate scientists*” and added that she had tasked the Academy of sciences with “*the organisation of a calm debate, arbitrated by peers*” on the climate question.

The signatories of the text write: “*For several months, scientists, recognised in their respective domains, are denigrating the climate sciences and its international expertise (that is to say, the IPCC), proclaiming a scientific fraud; as Claude Allègre has done in The Climate Deception (Plon, 2010); and pointing out claimed “errors of the IPCC [GIEC in French]”, as Vincent Courtillot has done in New Journey to the Centre of the Earth (Odil Jacob, 2009) and in academic seminars”.*

M. Allègre’s latest work upholds the theory that there is a conspiracy of climate science researchers to enhance belief in the idea of the human origin of climate change. M. Courtillot’s

book, which is much less polemical, is a collection of reflections on geoscience in the broad sense, from the domain of the interior of the Earth to that of climate questions.



The signatories, who belong to diverse communities – atmospheric physics, glaciology, geochemistry, geography, and oceanography – consider that the public declarations of these two geologists are not in line with the framework of a legitimate scientific debate. “[Their] peremptory accusations or affirmations are not subject to the standard filter of scientific publications”, they write. “These documents, published under the cover of scientific authority, were not reviewed by peers, and escape from this fact by virtue of the open debate.”

“Their authors forget the basic principles of the scientific ethic, breaking the moral pact which links every scientist to society”, add the 400 petitioners, among whom is the climate historian Emmanuel Leroy-Ladurie, the

glaciologist Claude Lorius, gold medallist of the CNRS, and the Belgian geophysicist André Berger, honorary president of the European Union of Sciences and foreign member of the French Academy of sciences.

“Revolted”

The text was supposed to remain confidential and not be sent to its recipients until 6 April. A leak to the blogosphere on 30 March hastened the agenda. “*We were caught short, but we were in the process of finalising the document of around 50 pages, which will be sent to the recipients on 6 April, along with the definitive list of signatories, and which will list the collection of errors contained in The Climate Deception and New Journey to the Centre of the Earth, as well as in the lectures of M. Courtillot, widespread over the internet*”, explains one of the authors of the text. “*We are truly revolted by the continuous and reiterated presentation of false data and false diagrams. It was an extraordinary situation for us, for which we were not prepared*”.

Several foreign researchers - Carl Wunsch (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Sami Solanki (Max-Planck Institute for Solar System Research), Gerd Wandler (University of Alaska) and Dennis Hartmann (University of Washington) – were already concerned to see their research or their ideas travestied in M. Allègre’s book. Interviewed by *Libération*, the Swedish palaeoclimatologist Håkan Grudd (University of Stockholm) even accuses the former minister in his book of having taken and doctored one of his graphs, published in 2008 in the journal *Climate Dynamics*. The British glaciologist Louise Sime (British Antarctic Survey) has also denounced the “*incorrect*” use of her research.

Claude Allègre had responded to this newspaper that his book was “*first and foremost political*”. “*All the graphs therein were redrawn*”, he added. “*Thus there are inexactitudes or even exaggerations compared to the originals. It is an editorial decision*”.

Neither M. Allègre nor M. Courtillot replied to the entreaties of *Le Monde* to respond. The former minister asserted in *Libération* that this petition was “*worthless and stupid*”. It is “*a reaction of people who see that my ideas are gaining ground and who are panicking*” he said. According to M. Allègre, his latest book has sold more than 120,000 copies.

Stéphane Foucart

Translated from the French by David Smythe